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NEIGHBORHOOD DISCUSSION GROUPS IN RELATION TO THE FSA PROGRAM IN DESHA COUNTY, ARKANSAS, - 1942 1/

History

A program of neighborhood discussion groups among low-income farmers, particularly among FSA borrowers, was initiated in Desha County, Ark., when 100 white and 33 Negro farmers met in separate meetings at McGehee on April 2, 1942 at the request of the County FSA Supervisor.

These meetings were called to explore with the assembled farmers, who were selected by the County FSA staff as leaders among their neighbors, the possibilities of organizing neighborhood discussion groups in their respective neighborhoods for the purpose of studying their common problems. By way of illustrating the need for neighborhood discussion groups, the FSA Supervisor, who presided, called attention to the fact that farmers are faced with many problems, such as increasing the production of food for victory, curtailed transportation facilities, lack of tools and equipment, and a farm labor shortage.

The question of organizing discussion groups evoked statements from farm people concerning the need for both greater neighborliness and a spirit of sharing. Many of these statements harked back to the "good old days" when people helped each other with harvesting, log rolling, and similar activities. The consensus seemed to be that as the war went on farmers would have to rely more and more on this type of informal cooperation.

The only specific instructions given at this "send off" meeting were (1) that each temporary group leader should, within the month, call in his neighbors for a get-together and group discussion, and (2) that at the first meetings his neighbors should elect a permanent leader of their own choice, who would then assume the responsibility for calling future meetings.

The temporary group leaders who attended the April 2 meetings were selected on the basis of geographic location, personal character, tenure stability, and cooperative spirit.

Before the meetings mentioned the FSA staff apportioned the county's 448 FSA families among the several neighborhoods of the county. Altogether 81 "neighborhoods" of 5 to 8 families were set up.

Practically all of the 81 leaders made conscientious efforts to get their neighbors to take part in a neighborhood discussion group meeting. Their efforts met with varying success. Only 11 neighborhoods reported in writing to the County Supervisor concerning their initial meetings during the month of April, but what these reported is probably a fair sample of what occurred at all the initial meetings. At least the reports indicate the procedures followed in the initial stages of the voluntary discussion group program in the county.

1/ This study was made by Wilson Longmore, U.S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, under the supervision of T. G. Standing, Area Leader, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Representation of FSA families at the first meetings held in the 11 neighborhoods was good. Of the 64 FSA families who were assigned to the 11 neighborhood groups, 44 were represented at one or another of the April meetings. Almost half of the persons attending were men, slightly more than one-fourth were homemakers, and somewhat more than 10 percent were children over 12 years old.

Although FSA families predominated in the meetings, nonborrowers made up 13 percent of the total attendance. This indicates that leaders did not think entirely in terms of FSA families but included in their discussion groups other families in the neighborhood with whom they were acquainted. The number of families per meeting was five, including non-FSA "visitors," as they are called by FSA families. The average number of FSA families represented was four.

After the first series of neighborhood meetings was completed, a county-wide training meeting for group leaders was held at McGehee in May. Thirty five white persons and 10 Negroes attended. This meeting was primarily educational, designed to develop leadership among low-income farmers and to acquaint them with discussion methods and with topics suitable for discussion in their own neighborhood groups. Discussion was centered on the following topics: Insect control in home gardens, better livestock and poultry care, and need for increased production of certain seasonal crops. Information about these was designed to inform and guide the leaders in their neighborhood discussion program.

During the month of May, 14 meetings were reported in writing to the County Supervisor. As at the April meetings, the average number of families per meeting was five. Eighty two percent of all FSA families in the 14 neighborhoods attended these meetings. This number represented a 13-percent increase over the number which attended the April meetings.

A change in the procedure for training the leaders was instituted in June. Instead of a single county-wide training meeting at McGehee it was decided to hold a series of meetings at various community centers in the county. Accordingly, meetings were held at 11 centers: McGehee, Winchester, Ditch 43, Kelso, Dumas, Watson, Red Fork Bayou, Sherril Farm, East McGehee, Arkansas City, and Halley. The chief topic was "Farm Debt Adjustment and Tenure Improvement." Each leader was given a supply of "Question and Answer" forms bearing directly on this topic. The plan was for the group leaders to distribute these forms to the members of their respective neighborhood discussion groups and to discuss the contents of them at subsequent neighborhood meetings.

In June the rains began and only eight neighborhood meetings were reported to the County Supervisor, but the average number of FSA families per meeting rose to approximately six. The rains continued into July, and by that time farmers were so busy catching up with their farm work that they had little time to attend neighborhood discussion groups. Only two meetings were reported in July and no meetings were reported during August, because of increased activity on the farm and to the disruption of normal community life by the growing demand for construction workers on the Japanese Relocation Site at Rohwer. The effects of this intensive construction in the county are very noticeable. It is not an exaggeration to say that a majority of the farmers in the vicinity of the camp have forgotten about their farming enterprises and neighborhood affairs since they began working at high wages on the construction job.

Typical of the situations encountered in interviewing discussion group leaders in the county is the story of a C and CS sorghum mill. This mill was purchased last year to serve six or seven farmers in the neighborhood. When milling time came the manager was working at the Relocation Side. Not wishing to give up his high wages, he hired a worker to run the sorghum mill at $2.50 per day. Later this worker demanded more money, so the manager fired him. As a consequence this mill will probably not be used this year and even the manager expects to let his own sorghum go unmilled.

Summary

The procedure employed in initiating neighborhood discussion groups in Desha County may be summarized as follows:

(1) Temporary leaders were selected from among FSA borrowers.
(2) All, or as many as feasible, of the FSA borrowers were apportioned to the temporary group leaders. Natural neighborhoods were kept in mind in making this apportionment, but no specific or detailed delineation of neighborhoods or communities was relied on.
(3) County-wide "kick-off" meeting held for the selected leaders.
(4) Each individual group leader invited his neighbors in to attend first neighborhood meeting.
(5) County-wide training meeting for leaders was conducted by county staff.
(6) A second neighborhood meeting was called by each local leader.
(7) A second county-wide leadership training meeting was held by FSA staff.
(8) Each local leader called a third neighborhood meeting.
(9) A third leadership-training meeting, this time on a community basis, was held by the FSA staff.
(10) Each local leader called a fourth neighborhood meeting.

Altogether, 35 neighborhood discussion group meetings were held: 11 in April, 14 in May, 8 in June, and 2 in July, according to reports made to the FSA Supervisor. A number of other meetings, for which no written reports were received, probably were held. A statistical analysis of the 35 meetings reported reveals the following:

(1) More FSA men than women attended: 185 men as against 118 women.
(2) Of the 410 persons who attended, 107 were either "visitors" or children under 12 years of age.
(3) A high percentage of FSA families attended the meetings. Figures for neighborhoods which reported attendance at meetings show that 157 of 200 families attended.
(4) "Visitors" or nonborrowers constituted a significant percentage of the total attendance: 13 percent.
(5) Neighborhood discussion groups in Desha County are small, averaging about five FSA families and one non-FSA family each.

Results

Some recognition of common problems confronting low-income farm people developed out of the discussion meetings. For example, it was recognized almost

immediately that some families, in order to increase the production of vital foods for the war demand, needed equipment to harvest their hay crop so that it might be converted into milk and butter. As a result, nine cooperative projects, in which 45 farmers participated, were organized.

Discussions in neighborhood meetings elicited the following suggestions concerning common needs and types of assistance required by low-income farmers in Desha County: hay harvesting equipment, home improvement, increased opportunity for farm ownership, better land to rent, improvement of lease arrangements, 4-H Club loans for childrens' projects, a sorghum mill, and an incubator.

Among the outstanding accomplishments of discussion groups, leaders listed the following:

(1) Learned to can fruit and vegetables successfully.
(2) Learned how to raise a garden.
(3) Learned how to control garden insects ("The powder really did the job.")
(4) Learned how to take care of poultry.
(5) Arranged for combining the oats.
(6) Raised real interest in a sorghum mill.

But perhaps the most far-reaching result of the neighborhood discussion group program is that through it low-income farm people have not only recognized some of their problems but have also begun to examine the possibilities of solving such problems cooperatively. True, in a majority of cases farmers have not yet been able to follow through with solutions to their problems, but they will make real progress as a general consensus is reached as to what their problems are and what possible courses of action are open to the people concerned.

Interviews with discussion group leaders brought out the following additional problems faced by low-income farmers of Desha County: Inadequate roads and other transportation facilities, shortage of farm labor, lack of adequate farm equipment, drainage, transporting children to school, vaccination for hog cholera, and inadequat church facilities.

Present Situation

By a regrouping of neighborhoods the county supervisory staff has reduced the number of neighborhood discussion groups from the original 81 to 67. This revision was based on actual field experience in putting the program into effect. It indicates the need for flexibility in administration of such a program.

County FSA personnel were asked to rate these 67 groups with respect to their status as of September 1942. These are at best highly subjective ratings but nevertheless they do provide a rough measure of the status of each discussion group. Each group was discussed briefly and then rated according to whether it was "good," "fair," or "nonfunctioning." Twenty groups were rated "good," 27 "fair," and 20 "nonfunctioning." Inasmuch as differences between groups rated as "good" and those rated as "fair" were found to be relatively slight, analysis in the following pages will be limited to the comparison of "functioning" and "nonfunctioning" groups.

Groups classified as "nonfunctioning" were, on the average, smaller than "functioning" groups: 5 families as against 6 families.

Interviews were held with leaders or their wives representing a random sample of all neighborhood discussion groups based roughly on the relative proportion in each rating category. The sample consisted of 13 "functioning" groups and 5 "nonfunctioning" groups. It was hoped that interviews could be made in all cases with the leaders personally, but because of the intensive farm work period and the great construction activity at the Relocation Site only 8 of the 18 leaders were actually contacted. However, in all cases either the leader himself or his wife was interviewed. In addition to these 18 interviews with discussion group leaders or their wives a number of informal interviews were held with neighboring farmers.

During these interviews an attempt was made to obtain the following information:

(1) Degree of responsibility assumed by the group leader.
(2) Present status of the neighborhood discussion group.
(3) Obstacles encountered.
(4) Number of non-FSA families included.
(5) Sociological factors related to success or failure of group.
(6) Leader's understanding of "philosophy" of discussion groups.
(7) Attitudes toward cooperatives.
(9) Farm and home problems.
(9) Plans for future discussion group meetings.

Degree of Responsibility Assumed by the Group Leader

Interviews revealed that leaders have tried conscientiously to do their job as a group leader. This is substantiated by such statements as:

"Well, I've invited them in twice but no one comes. It's sure hard to get them in."

"Yes, I was appointed leader in this neighborhood and we meet out on the front porch. These folks sure need something like that to give them a little confidence in themselves."

"We've studied the material sent out from the Supervisor on 'Garden Seed,' 'Raise Your Own Meat,' and 'Food for Freedom.'"

"I try to reason with my neighbors that they ought to show their appreciation to the Government by attending meetings."

"They tell me that I can't tell them anything that they don't already know themselves, that's why they don't come. But I tell them that maybe by pooling what each one knows we can get somewhere."

"We want to cooperate all we can to help our country win this war."

"I've tried hard to get them out, they say it's just another one of those Government things."

"Just give us time. We'll get going. We needs time to get 'lightened. Especially us colored folks. This is a new thing, we need 'lightenment. We all want to help SFA (sic) all we can."

No apparent differences were noted in the attitude of leaders of "functioning" and "nonfunctioning" groups.

Present Status of the Neighborhood Discussion Groups

Of the 18 neighborhood groups contacted, only 2 (1 white and 1 Negro) are functioning effectively, 8 (4 white and 4 Negro) have latent possibilities, and the remaining 8 are "dead."

The practice has been for the groups to meet either in the afternoon or at night, little preference being expressed. The meeting place in each instance has been the home of one of the neighbors, either in the front yard or inside the house. Sometimes the entire family attends but more often only the husband. Most of the families walk to the meetings.

Obstacles Encountered

These can be summed up briefly by statements made by the leaders or wives interviewed.

"People just won't come."

"People lack confidence in themselves."

"There isn't much spirit of neighborliness around here."

"Everyone is working on the Jap Colony."

"The white families are too scattered, all Negroes in here."

"Too busy on the farm."

"I don't understand what we were supposed to do."

"Just another Government thing."

"If one of the Supervisors would attend they would all be there."

"Needs time for 'lightenment."

"One won't come because he figgers FSA owes him a house."

"Some of the folks are afeard that the Government will foreclose on them just like the bank."

"There ain't no community life here. School's at Kelso, church there, too."

"Most of the families are new in here. Came in since 1939 and cleared up the land."

"We're going to have to move this year anyhow."

"People don't accept leadership."

Number of Non-FSA Families Included

By far the majority of the leaders had the idea that only FSA borrowers were to be invited to the neighborhood discussion meetings. This undoubtedly came about because each leader was supplied by the county staff with a list of his FSA neighbors. In all cases they were perturbed by this exclusiveness and expressed a hope that other neighbors might be brought in. Some went so far as to say that it would not work as an exclusive FSA neighborhood group. Most of the groups actually had non-FSA borrowers at their meetings.

Sociological Factors Related to Success or Failure of Discussion Group

One of the most important facts which must be considered in mobilizing rural neighborhoods in Desha County is the geographical isolation of farm families residing in "new ground" areas. Their settlement has been so recent that patterns of social interaction and institutional development have not yet become well established and many farm families in low-income brackets feel insecure and are lacking in confidence. Closely related to geographic and social isolation is the lack of adequate roads; 84 percent of Desha County's farms are located on dirt roads, impassable much of the year.

Another point is the lack of institutional centers in the various neighborhoods. School consolidation has contributed to this situation and even churches are usually located in the small towns. However, this description fits the white population more closely than it does the Negro group. This may account in part for the generalization made by members of the county staff to the effect that Negroes are more readily mobilized into neighborhood discussion groups than are whites.

Some FSA families are so scattered that it is almost impossible to group them into genuine neighborhoods. These isolated settlers have perplexed the county staff in their efforts at promoting discussion groups which will include all FSA borrowers.

In the plantation areas around Dumas, Pickens, and McGehee certain traditional attitudes are obstacles to organization. Initiative is lacking among these farmers, partly at least, because in their experience as sharecroppers they have had little chance to develop it. This was well demonstrated in an interview with one of the Negro leaders. Asked how his neighborhood discussion group was working, he replied, "We've been waiting for you to send out a notice of the meeting and our report paper." FSA does not reach the families on the plantations because they do not qualify for aid. Around McGehee some of the large plantations are being broken up but the old attitudes persist. Another Negro, when asked who owned the farms in the neighborhood, said, "Mister Miley" (County Supervisor)!

A factor of more or less temporary significance is the instability induced in the county by the construction on the Rohwer Japanese Relocation Site. This work has influenced individual farming operations greatly and has interfered

with normal community activities. Similar consequences can be traced to the mobility and tenure insecurity which are pronounced even in normal times throughout the county. It is impossible for many families to plan their own affairs from year to year. Furthermore, it is difficult for them to participate in community undertakings which require much time and persistent effort. This instability is less noticeable among the Negro population.

The lack of tires is beginning to affect rural parts of the county. This lack increases marketing and transportation problems and may interfere with some social activities. In the long run, however, it may bring about a greater degree of neighborliness and local cooperation among low-income farm families, and the rubber shortage may have less effect in Desha County than in some other areas since only 362 farms, or 9 percent of all farms in the county, had automobiles in 1940.

The level of living among farmers in Desha County is relatively low. Of 4,050 farms, only 122 had electricity and only 63 had telephones, according to the Census of 1940. As far as mechanical power on the farm is concerned Desha County is also far down the list of counties. Only 5 percent of all farms reported trucks and only 3 percent, tractors.

Most of the factors heretofore cited tend to obstruct community organization in one way or another. But on the other hand, certain factors prevailing in the county tend to strengthen community life. Many of the rural areas have a heritage of informal cooperation and mutual help. It is often hard for the outsider to put his finger on these things because most of the local people take them for granted. It was found, after painstaking questioning, that the families in one neighborhood had long followed the custom of visiting together almost every Sunday afternoon. At these informal meetings they discussed mutual problems and made important decisions, yet the interviewed persons were not inclined to attach much importance to such informal organizations.

Prompted by lack of transportation facilities another neighborhood "just naturally" started to hold church and Sunday School in one of the neighbor's vacant buildings. Practically all of the farm families exchange tools, equipment and labor, at least occasionally. In one case a family lost its only cow, and a neighbor gave the family one of his to keep for the winter.

Leaders' Understanding of "Philosophy" of Discussion Groups

Confusion as to the objectives of discussion groups is widespread both among farm leaders and the supervisory staff. It is difficult to separate discussion groups in theory and practice from group supervision. Many participants think of discussion groups merely as another administrative device, and so they look to the FSA staff to provide leadership. Instead of regarding discussion groups as a means by which neighbors may express their opinions and attitudes and pool their knowledge and efforts in the solution of common problems, many of the participants think of such groups as a means of getting FSA to do something for them.

Attitudes Toward Cooperatives

Many leaders frankly admitted that their neighbors have little faith in "co-ops" as a way of solving their problems. One leader said he could not see how

they could make money for the farmer. Others thought of them as another "Government thing."

Although 25 of the C and CS projects are coterminous with neighborhood discussion groups it does not follow that they came about as the result of neighborhood discussion group action, or vice versa. Rather, the two programs have progressed independently of each other in a majority of cases, but as both programs are based somewhat on the natural groupings of families, they have much in common.

Farm and Home Problems

Some indication of what the leaders considered to be the important problems in their neighborhoods was derived from the interviews. A number thought farm tenancy was the greatest problem and stressed the wish of most farmers to have places of their own. Closely akin is instability of lease arrangements. Homemakers usually stressed problems more closely related to the home, such as better gardens, more complete community life, and home improvement.

Other problems mentioned by leaders as being of vital significance to low-income farm families included better roads and transportation facilities for farm produce, canning equipment, recreation for the children, keeping children in school, adequate clothing, and land drainage.

Plans for Future Discussion Group Meetings

Two thirds of the 18 interviewed leaders said they were planning to begin holding meetings again just as soon as the rush season was over. At least five or six expected greater interest than heretofore.

Most leaders thought that major emphasis should be directed toward food production and the war effort. They mentioned the Food for Freedom campaign and the great production drives facing this country.

Noticeably absent from any of the interviews were noncooperative attitudes or expressions of insincerity. The spirit of accepting the responsibilities of group leadership cannot be commended too highly. It provides a basis for increased faith in the ability of low-income farm families to develop the leadership and initiative essential to their rehabilitation.

Leadership Analysis

Success of neighborhood discussion groups is largely dependent upon effective leadership. A limited attempt was made to appraise the leadership by comparing the characteristics of the leaders with the "efficiency ratings" given the 67 neighborhood discussion groups by the supervisory staff. Findings may be generalized as follows:

(1) On the average, leaders of "functioning" groups finished the sixth grade; those of "nonfunctioning" groups, only the fifth.

(2) On the average, leaders of "functioning" groups had lived in the county for 20 years; those of "nonfunctioning" groups, only 9.

(3) A higher percentage of the leaders of "nonfunctioning" groups were tenants: 55 percent as against only 45 percent for leaders of "functioning" groups.

(4) Leaders of "nonfunctioning" groups operated larger farms than did leaders of "functioning" groups: 75 acres as against 54 acres.

Generalizations

FSA supervisors in Desha County have made some practical suggestions in the light of their experience to date in initiating a county-wide program of neighborhood discussion groups. Among them:

(1) Limited personnel and decreased means of transportation make collective or group supervision absolutely necessary.

(2) The FSA regional office should clarify the objectives of the neighborhood discussion group program and its relation to the older group supervision methods.

(3) It is desirable to distinguish between the two types of group meetings because failure to do so will bring confusion and lessen the effectiveness of both approaches. Perhaps the best way of making this distinction is to emphasize that in the supervisory meeting the initiative comes from the supervisory staff whereas in the discussion group it comes from the farm families themselves. This does not mean that the two types of meetings are mutually exclusive; actually, one may compliment the other.

From a purely practical standpoint it must be recognized that the neighborhood discussion group is in no sense a "cure-all". It can bring results only in proportion to the ability of its members to recognize problems and come to some agreement as to possible courses of action. Experience indicates that, in the long run, neighborhood discussion groups can aid materially in the rehabilitation process by developing leadership and tapping the potential abilities of low-income farm families. In the meantime, it will be necessary to continue to utilize the more direct methods of individual and group supervision.

The response of FSA families in Desha County to the direct methods of supervision has been good. On the other hand, the county staff is somewhat disappointed with the response to the neighborhood discussion group program. It feels that the program has introduced added supervisory difficulties because of the increased time required in organizing and keeping in contact with so many different groups.

The neighborhood discussion group program has not been entirely unsuccessful. Definite achievements can be observed even though the program has been operating less than 6 months. Complete coverage has not been attained and some neighborhood groups have not functioned at all while others appear to be gradually becoming inactive. But considering the voluntary nature of the program and the limited perspective and experience of many of the farm people definite progress has been made.

The county staff has worked out the following tentative plan of action for the next few months:

(1) Each supervisor is to take stock of the present neighborhood discussion groups which have been assigned to him and analyze each one with respect to (a) present status and prospects, (b) factors fostering or hindering group organization, and (c) the degree to which members have voluntarily assumed responsibilities and leadership.

(2) From among the 15 or 20 groups under his supervision, each supervisor will select 2 or 3 of the best and concentrate his time and effort in helping them. If members agree on a problem and want to get something done he will take the time to help them follow through regardless of how insignificant the problem appears to him.

(3) At the same time each supervisor will make fuller use of the entire group-leadership system to carry necessary information and help to individual farm families. This leadership organization might be compared to a one-way communication system between the supervisory personnel and individual farm families. The leader will assume the responsibility for getting the appropriate information to the families in his immediate neighborhood. This may be accomplished by calling a neighborhood meeting at one of the farm homes or it may involve individual contacts between the leader and his neighbors.

(4) Under this plan there will be in effect two kinds of organizations operating in the county. One will provide immediate county-wide coverage for supervision, while the other will be a matter of slower growth, taking hold where it can and being carefully encouraged as a "demonstration project." The speed with which the latter is organized will depend on the capacity of farm families in any neighborhood to assume responsibility and gain an understanding of the potentialities of group cooperation.

(5) All leadership-training meetings and meetings of families for strictly supervisory purposes will be held primarily on a community rather than a neighborhood basis. This should help to eliminate confusion in the minds of the farm families as to the purpose of the different programs. It should also make for the most efficient use of the supervisor's time and energy.

Experience has shown that some neighborhoods are slow in understanding what discussion groups can accomplish. But some of them do take hold. Success for a group action program may depend on such intangible attitudes as those expressed in the following statements:

"My neighbors are the finest people in the world."

"This is the best place to live I know of."

"We've got to cooperate to win the war."

"We just got together and built us a church."

Under the county staff's plan, groups that show most promise will be given every encouragement in order to serve as examples for other neighborhoods. Back of

this approach is a "follow-the-leader" psychology. The supervisors believe that by a more intensive approach in a limited number of neighborhoods they may be able to work out improved techniques through experimentation. They acknowledge that discussion group methods are slow and cannot be implanted arbitrarily but that such methods have certain intrinsic values difficult to measure.

"Neighborhood discussion groups help to lift farm families out of their everyday environment and give them an opportunity to express themselves." One home supervisor remarked "They help to break down a feeling of inferiority, too."

The following suggestions for organizing discussion groups are based primarily on experience with the program in Desha County:

(1) Study the neighborhoods carefully on the basis of personal knowledge and information gathered from farm people living in them. FSA Publication 108 is helpful in neighborhood analysis. If the supervisor is not well informed about the county, it will be desirable for him to study a copy of the neighborhood and community delineation map prepared for most counties by the Extension Service. This map can be used as a guide.

(2) On the basis of knowledge of the neighborhoods and the distribution of FSA families temporary leaders should be selected.

(3) The groups should not be smaller than 5 families nor larger than 15 families.

(4) Encourage the temporary leader to select the neighbors to be invited to the meeting. This may require some guidance by the supervisor to insure that as many FSA families as possible will be included.

(5) Let the group, at its first meeting, elect its own permanent leader.

(6) Stress the advantages of having the entire family attend.

(7) Let the discussion groups choose their own discussion topics. This does not rule out suggested readings and study material, but at no time should this material limit the field of action.

(8) Encourage the group to follow through on a single problem at a time.

(9) Have the local reporter send an informal account of each meeting to the supervisor.

(10) The FSA supervisory staff should remain in the background as much as possible. Let the farm families feel this is their own meeting.

Examples of Functioning Discussion Groups

Case A - Red Fork Bayou Neighborhood (White)

Number of Families: FSA families, 6; others, 2.

Location: Red Fork Bayou is located 3 miles southeast of Watson, an incorporated

town of 236 people. It is situated along the bayou from which it takes its name. A lone country road winds along the bayou course. The country is wooded and the farms are set in clearings. Some of the families are "new ground" settlers.

Neighborhood and Leader Analysis: Members of this group have a real sense of belonging to the neighborhood. Six FSA families and 2 visiting families usually attend meetings. The leader did not have the "you-can't-get-them-out" attitude. He talked confidently about the prevailing spirit of neighborliness. Two of his comments follow: "My neighbors are the best people in the world." "This is one of the nicest places in the world to live."

The leader is a Tenant-Purchase client, 53 years old, with a family of 6. His farm consists of 120 acres on which he has lived 3 years.

Neighborhood discussion group meetings are held at the leader's home. Neighbor families refer to the "only new, white house on the road" in directing strangers to the leader's home. According to the leader his home is the most convenient, having a fine front yard and porch. When meetings are held in the afternoon the usual procedure is to meet indoors; night meetings often are held outdoors. All families walk to the meeting.

Before Pearl Harbor, this group of families arranged with a bus driver from Watson school to pick up children on Sunday to take them to church and Sunday School. Then rubber became scarce and the bus service was discontinued. The families found a possible solution in the offer of a neighbor to let them use one of his buildings for a church. Now the neighborhood families walk to church which is in this building.

The discussion group helped work out this arrangement but Red Fork Bayou is an active neighborhood in other ways. For instance, it has a Home Demonstration Club which meets monthly and includes a wider circle of families than the discussion group. The families exchange tools and equipment and sometimes cooperate in their farm work. Some of the farmers share a C and CS rake and mower. Strangely enough, many of the families don't take much stock in "co-ops".

Some of the activities sponsored during the six meetings of the neighborhood discussion group include: Home canning, raise garden seed, more home-grown meat, farm-tenure improvement, and farm-debt adjustment.

Case B - West Jefferson Neighborhood (Negro)

Number of Families: FSA families 8; others 3

Location: West Jefferson is located east of Pickens in a new ground area. All farms are some distance from a main road. The general situation among the families suggests a frontier area of 80 to 100 years ago. Each farm has its own individual clearing surrounded by forest. It is impossible to see any of the other farm houses from the leader's home yet they are within easy walking distance.

Neighborhood and Leader Analysis: All 8 FSA families live within a radius of 2 to 3 miles. The West Jefferson Neighborhood Discussion Group meets regularly once a month. Visitors often come from as far as 4 or 5 miles.

They meet on the porch if weather permits, inside if it is too hot or rainy. The leader is the wife of a farm owner. She finds time in addition to her leader responsibility, to take care of a family of 8 children and perform her duties as an Extension "Minuteman" and leader of the 4-H Club.

Things they have talked over and agreed upon include a road into their neighborhood, need for production tools and equipment, more adequate transportati better schools, control of chick lice, increased production for the war, better care of livestock, insect control, and, finally, home gardens. But of these the most pressing is a road.

Says the leader: "We want to cooperate all we can to help our country win this war. By saving and raising more of our necessities at home we will be able to feed all our allies. What we need is a good road so that we can market our surplus potatoes, eggs, and cream."

The 34-year-old leader was raised in Desha County, attending the New Life school at Dermott. She likes her neighbors, thinks they are cooperative, and that all they need is encouragement and a little help.

That they help themselves was evidenced by the fact that they had just completed building a commodious new church to stand beside their school.

This is a neighborhood in embryo. Negro families, faced with the isolation imposed by frontier conditions, are developing a crude but satisfactory institutional pattern. Their way of life here is circumscribed but within an area of approximately 10 square miles is relatively complete and self-sufficient.

It takes years to clear land with the primitive methods used and this means bare subsistence until production is under way. Sharing of equipment and labor is prevalent, particularly among the related families.

Examples of Nonfunctioning Discussion Groups

Case C - West Jefferson Neighborhood (White)

Number of Families: FSA families, 3; others, none.

Location: West Jefferson is located northeast of Winchester on the eastern fringe of the "plantation area". It is a small area located along Amos Bayou.

Neighborhood and Leader Analysis: The group leader is 33 years of age, a Tenant-Purchase borrower, operates a farm of 94 acres, and has 3 members in his family. He completed the 8th grade in school. This leader does not think he can get his neighbors to attend a discussion circle. He takes for granted that the neighbors are satisfied with things as they are and doesn't see any way that discussion groups might improve conditions.

The leader is a master borrower on a C and CS combine. After he bought the combine 6 other persons bought one too and many of the farmers that had signed up on his cooperative failed to "come through". He says that the farmers lack confidence in cooperatives and don't see how they can make any money through them The leader thinks of neighborhood discussion groups as another government organization. He acknowledged that he did not know what they were designed to do.

There are only 3 FSA families in this neighborhood. The county road is in fair condition. The kinship tie is lacking. A Home Demonstration Club meets monthly and most of the homemakers attend, but this Club includes 2 or 3 different neighborhoods. A few of the families get together on Sunday or other special occasions to visit and "socialize". These families also share tools, equipment, and labor.

The children go 2 miles to Jefferson school. The community shares in a very limited school program. The church is also located at Jefferson.

Case D - Gum Ridge Neighborhood (Negro)

Number of Families: FSA families, 6; others, 2.

Location: Gum Ridge is located 4 miles south of McGehee on U.S.Highway 65 in an old plantation area.

Gum Ridge has held one discussion group meeting at which 6 Negro families were present. The leader stated that two non-FSA families would come if they were invited, but he thought it was only for the FSA borrowers.

Neighborhood and Leader Analysis: The Negro leader is 48 years old and has finished the 4th grade in school. The family consists only of the leader and his wife. He has been in Desha County 5 years, and he now rents 32 acres of land.

The families reportedly live in an area where drainage is their greatest problem. The leader says that all the families are eager to cooperate with FSA in any program. The Negro families are anxious to own their own farm.

The leader commented as follows:

"Just give us time and we'll get going. We needs time to get enlightened. Especially us colored folk. This is a new thing and we need to be 'lightened. We sure think SFA (sic) is fine."

The kinship factor is strong. Church is held among neighbors in various homes. The children attend school at Masonville, a Negro village, 5 miles distant.

This group has a high degree of solidarity and with some encouragement has good possibilities of becoming a successful discussion group.